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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 001470

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNSC](#) [BM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: PM ABDULLAH SAYS CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT
HAS FAILED; BURMESE PROTEST IN KUALA LUMPUR

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 1439 - DOES NOT BACK UNSC ROLE

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 1386 - NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ON UNSC ROLE

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark
for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Following the release of the tough September 27 ASEAN statement on Burma, both Prime Minister Abdullah and Foreign Minister Hamid hardened their tone and concluded that ASEAN would have to rethink its demands and expectations vis--vis Burma, with the PM stating that ASEAN's "constructive engagement has not succeeded." Earlier in the week, FM Hamid described the region's disappointment with Burma, but he also drew praise from Burmese officials for reiterating Malaysia's stand against use of sanctions. MFA Secretary General Rastam reportedly focused on China's crucial role and ASEAN's limited options in a conversation with our British counterparts. Opposition leaders openly criticized the GOM's oil and gas deals with Burma, accusing the government of undermining reform by enriching Burma's military leadership. Some 2,000 Burmese refugees, migrant laborers, students and political activists staged a demonstration in front of the Burmese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on September 28 in a show of solidarity with the recent protests in Rangoon. Local newspapers continued for a third day to give prominent billing to the protests in Rangoon. End Summary.

Malaysian Leaders Take Stronger Stand Following ASEAN
Statement

[1](#)2. (SBU) In light of the hard-hitting ASEAN statement of September 27 expressing revulsion at the military crackdown in Burma, Malaysian leaders in New York took a stronger tone in their Burma comments and signaled recognition that the situation in Burma required a change in approach. The official news agency Bernama reported PM Abdullah's toughest statements yet. After release of the ASEAN statement PM Abdullah commented that "constructive engagement...has not succeeded. It was a formula that we used when dealing with Myanmar but up to this stage it has not been successful." PM Abdullah continued that, "It has been already many years now and the situation that has now erupted in Myanmar certainly reflects the true situation and the feelings of the people with regard to the political situation." Against the backdrop of these mass demonstrations, Abdullah said, ASEAN had to rethink its demands and expectations vis--vis Burma. He emphasized that "ASEAN has never issued such a statement on Myanmar - until now."

13. (SBU) Foreign Minister Hamid followed suit by changing his tune. Speaking after the September 27 ASEAN statement, Hamid said that the Burma situation was now "beyond ASEAN's control...It has become an international issue which we in ASEAN must give attention to." He referred to ASEAN's demand for the release of ASSK and said it was time for the Burma government to listen to the people. Earlier in the week he had noted Malaysia's clear disappointment with Burma's lack of progress and Burma's embarrassment to the region. As recently as September 25-26, however, the Foreign Minister also repeated Malaysia's long standing policy of non-interference in domestic problems of another nation, ruled out agreeing to any economic sanctions against the junta, and argued that sanctions would only hurt the people and not affect the ruling government. Hamid further remarked, "We think the best way of resolving the issue is to get the constitutional process on track, to get the reconciliation going." In remarks carried by Malaysia's official news agency, the head of Burma's information agency later expressed appreciation at Malaysia's rejection of economic sanctions and reiterated Hamid's remarks that Burma has ample natural resources to withstand Western economic sanctions.

14. (C) We received a read-out from a British diplomat on their September 28 conversation with MFA Secretary General Rastam. Rastam said Malaysia shared the international concern over Burma and fully supported UN Special Envoy Gambari's mission. He also noted, however, that Chinese influence over Burma was crucial and implied, according to the British diplomat, that there was little ASEAN as a whole could achieve. Instead, it may be up to individual ASEAN countries to engage in their own ways.

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Opposition Statement Calls for Work with U.S., Others

15. (SBU) Pointing out the dichotomy between mere words and actions, Malaysia's leader of opposition in Parliament, Lim Kit Siang, released a statement on September 28 urging stronger action: "ASEAN leaders cannot just wring their hands in impotence and revulsion with another round of violent crackdown of peaceful protestors in Burma. They should work with China, India, Russia, United States and European Union to craft a joint response to end the spiral of violence by the Burmese military." Lim urged PM Abdullah to place Burma as the top priority in his address to the UN, and to rally international support for a special debate in the General Assembly as well as an emergency meeting of the Security Council. Opposition party members complained that Malaysia's national oil company, Petronas, exacerbated the issues in Burma by propping up the junta with lucrative oil and gas deals. MP Teresa Kok from the opposition Democratic Action Party told the press: "These investments enrich the junta and prolong their helm. Worse still, they use such money to buy weapons deployed against their own citizens."

Burmese Protest in Kuala Lumpur

16. (SBU) Up to two thousand Burmese refugees, migrant laborers, students and political activists staged a protest in front of the Burmese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on September 28. Malaysian riot police with water cannons parked nearby guarded the front of the Burmese Embassy, but the peaceful protest brought no untoward reaction from the police. The street in front of the Burmese embassy was closed to traffic for approximately two hours as many of the demonstrators, mostly clad in red, sat down in the middle of the street in a show of solidarity with their countrymen protesting in Rangoon. After protesting in front of the Burmese Embassy, the crowd moved one block north and continued their demonstration in front of the Chinese Embassy. The demonstration ended peacefully and there was no damage to

property nor any injuries reported.

Local Press Coverage

17. (SBU) Local newspapers continued for a third day to give front page or prominent international section billing to the protests in Rangoon. Print and online media focused on the recent crackdown in Burma, but the print media predictably remained more neutral in its reporting. Online news portal Malaysiakini criticized Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar's comments characterizing the crackdown in Burma as an "internal problem" and that Malaysia's position was "not to interfere."

Comment

18. (C) The stronger statements by Prime Minister Abdullah and Foreign Minister Hamid in the wake of the tough ASEAN position are welcome. Public acknowledgement of constructive engagement's failure clearly implies the need for a new approach. A continued and concerted effort on the part of other ASEAN nations will increase the chances of Malaysia agreeing to stronger action and cooperating with the U.S. and other countries to effect democratic reform in Burma.
KEITH